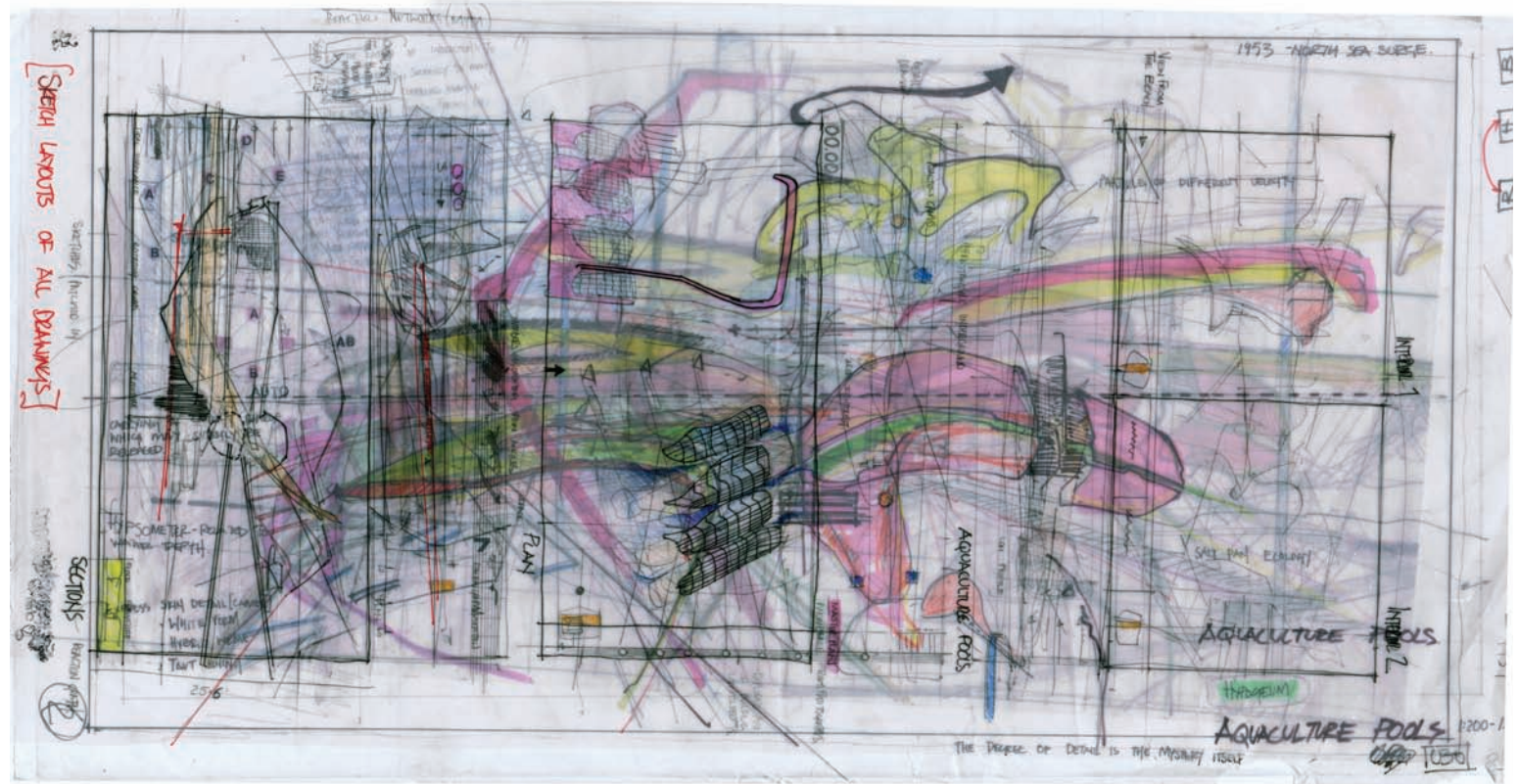


Ideation



Level 1, opening the tropology of architecture, accelerated bodies and mobile horizons, ENIAtype 2012.

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NICK LAND

# Introductions to the afterlife

As a name, and perhaps a slogan, *design ecologies* operates as a semiotic particle accelerator. It crashes terms together that have little obvious affinity and even negative, or mutually repulsive valence, fusing them momentarily – but repeatedly – into unstable super particles, amidst explosions of cryptic debris.

In its traditional acceptance, which has persisted into the professional discourse of architecture, *design* is or prepares for, a realization of the integral idea. In its intrinsic coherence, completeness, intelligibility and transcendence, it stands above, before and independent of the dispersed, obscurely interconnected, factuality of nature – as an alternative to those spontaneously coordinated distributions that would eventually be called *ecologies*. Insofar as design provides a general model of order, schematizing the conformity of matter to an idea, it confronts ecology – or spontaneous, disintegrated coordination – as an alien and incompatible hypothesis.

When ‘design ecologies’ is construed as an imperative, or command, cognitive inconsistency is converted into practical paralysis. In an age hypersensitized to the growing importance of ‘creative industries’, in which, therefore, strictly analogous requirements to *plan spontaneity* or *program the unimagined* have become banal administrative obligations, the instruction to *design ecologies* arrives preloaded with concrete socio-historical reference and satirical effectiveness. These elements cannot be coldly fused. Nothing less than a high-energy collision will synthesize them.



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Over the course of its comparatively short history, ‘ecology’ has undergone a peculiar and peculiarly standardized process of ontological transference – a retrospective projection, of a kind previously exemplified by disciplinary descriptors such as biology, psychology or – indeed – ontology ‘itself’. Initiated in the nineteenth century as a mode and topic of rigorous learning, it has been naturalized, or written back into the aboriginal structure of the world, until ‘ecologies’ are suspected in the depths of things, waiting to be found. This development is entirely typical, and (when noted) typically endorsed as simple realism, indistinguishable from the intelligibility of being and thus from the very possibility of science. There are ecologies and then – much later – a science emerges to study them, from which they borrow their most generic name. What could be clearer or more sensible?

Science becomes recognizable as such when its most characteristic signs are separated from themselves, drastically yet for the most part imperceptibly, in order to become – simultaneously – the labels for established intellectual undertakings and markers for domains of pre-articulated being. For any science, institutional maturity is reached when the scientific determination of the object is seen – and colloquially acknowledged – as already inherent in the object itself, prior to its redoubling through reflective apprehension. Following a slippage of signs amounting almost to ventriloquism, being itself seems to demand the existence of its scientific counterparties, determining the parameters of their investigations and announcing what needs to be known.

When switching between the systematically correlated meanings of *architecture* – between ‘schools of architecture’ and a city’s ‘architectural landmarks’, for instance – a rigorously comparable example of *institutional consolidation through ontological projection* is evident in all of its triumphant humility. The built environment, or tectosphere, authorizes a discipline that is devoted to its existence. Through this projection, echo and reverberation, architecture as an institution is affirmed as a *response*, called into being by an insistent mumbling that seems to emanate from the stones themselves.

When the accelerated particles of design ecologies collide, their impact generates an extraordinary question: how might the ontological projection of architecture be retracted into its *design* or preliminary articulation, complementary to the re-emergence of an indeterminate or non-objective ‘nature’? What would architecture become, if freed from the ‘scientific’ prestige found in triumphant humility, it no longer recognized its reflection in buildings or structural accomplishments? What if architectural design were no longer legitimated through a promised structure or even a mere imagined one, but was instead to reach absolute continuity, in which construction constructed itself?

This question, or – more realistically – *design problem*, is immediately ecological, because it redistributes connections. Despite its soft semiotic, involutionary and molecular subtlety, this reworking of connectivity is essentially drastic and therefore accompanied by the aesthetic markers of violence: ripped out wiring, broken pipes, demolished walls, re-routed traffic, severed socio-economic arteries, shocking disruptions, bankruptcies, panics, desertions and extinctions that attest to an induced catastrophe of organic order. The tectosphere collapses into architecture and



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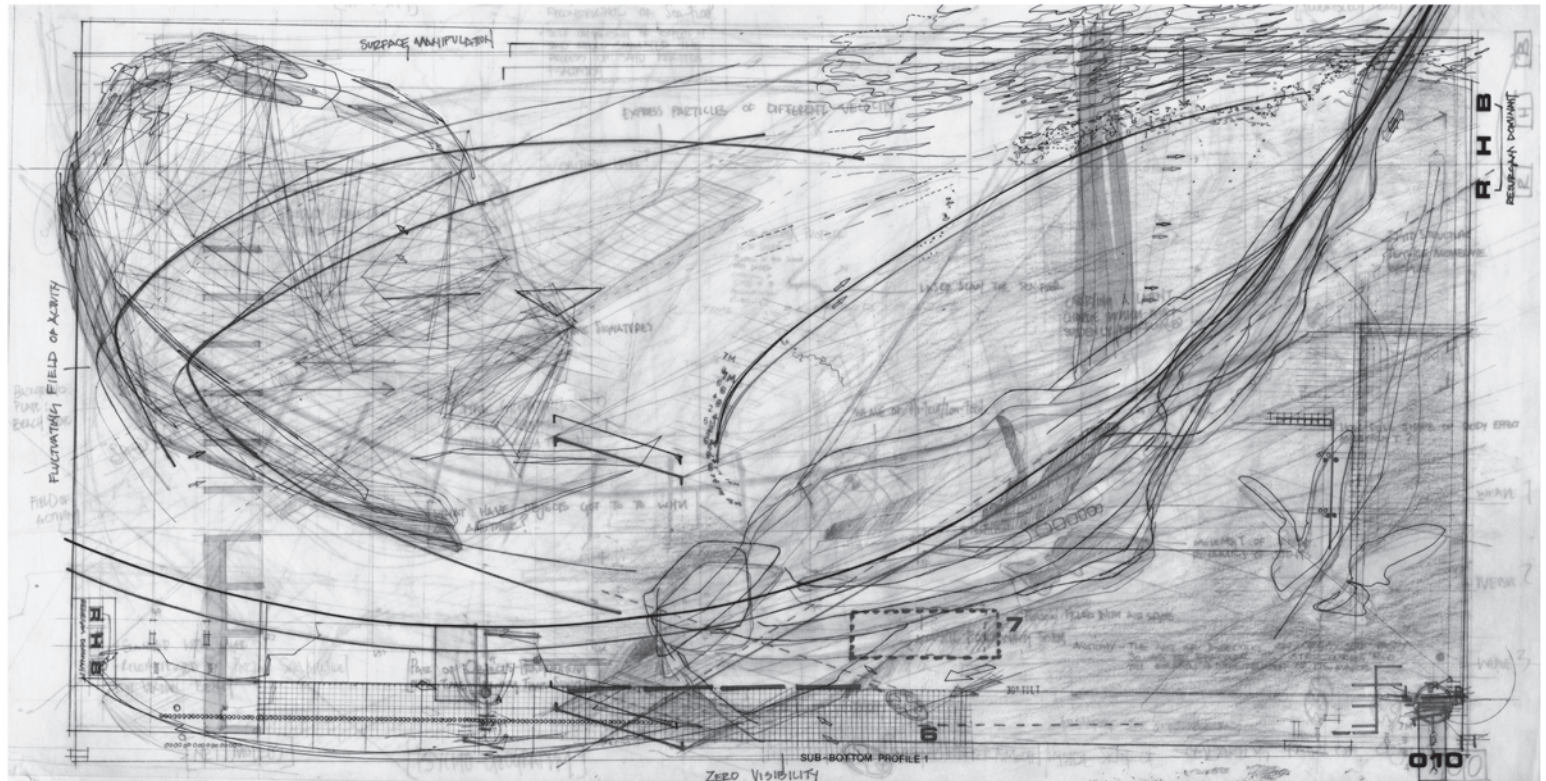
everything that was settled is unmade. Nothing has, any longer, *ever been finished*. The built world vaporizes in soft apocalypse.

The systematicity of the ecosystem is no longer presupposed, and subsequently confirmed, but is rather re-synchronized to a continuous design stage. It thus amounts to an ecological *argument from design* that partially reverses, and entirely interrupts, the one known from natural theology. Nature is not revealed as the sign of a higher artifice and thus conceptually stabilized as a settled creation, but drawn, practically, into the incompleteness of the design process. As nature is unsettled by reversion to design, it surrenders all principled distinction from artifice, whilst exposing itself, in pieces, as a built or constructed 'environment' (in process). The fraying of ecology into design, through the 'strategic' insertion of incompleteness, replaces the ideal of a discoverable archetype with 'an emerging design theory' or *Eniatype* – a learning procedure that is itself under construction.

At the limit of absolute consistency, or structural collapse, where signs and substances lose ontological distinctiveness, and the formulation of design is indistinguishable from its implementation, ecologies are populated by 'complex notational systems' or nebulous materials: 'Climate proxies, dust, temperature, precipitation, chemistry and gas composition of [the] lower atmosphere ...'. At once clouds of variable density and indices of complex interconnections, such notational markers are stripped of all pretence to rational or representational values that could be separated from the fabrications they enter into, dissolving the preparatory and programmatic status of architectural semiotics into patterns of constructive involvement and artificial perception. Within architecture of the advanced Eniatype, there is no language that is not immediately building material, and no plan that is temporally separable from project development. 'Architects are the editors of the environment ...'

By venturing beyond the triumphant humility of scientific planning, into uncircumscribed experiments with diffuse, intricately interlinked sign-materials, Eniatype promotes adaptation to the semi-otically volatilized environments induced by increasingly 'sentient' digital-electronic technologies, 'advanced holography, telematic communications, ubiquitous computing and advanced control software.' Such technologies *allow us to define a fundamentally new, radically restructured architecture for our notational systems. Notations are used to construct all architectural drawings and have often been studied as whole in space, but never before have they been studied as whole in time. The interests reside in a synthesis that proposes that notations adapt best when constantly refined and reshaped by their occupants, and that architects can mature from being artists of space to becoming artists of time. A reconciliation with the unknown in the materiality of form.*

Eniatype is fully consummated within the process of building, once this is liberated from all conceptual (and practical) dependency upon the ideal of *the building* and its redemptive finality. Rather than facilitating a sequenced project, proceeding from complete plan to finished structure, it tends to realize its own presupposition in a continuous, non-terminal and multiscaled temporality. The time of architectural realization is extracted ('unpacked') from the punctual *moment* of structural



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completion drawn back into design and ‘at the same time’ prolonged into the architectural afterlife of inhabitation, utilization, teleological revision and dilapidation.

As an ecological assemblage, the building is continuous with the way that it is occupied, attrited and even abandoned. It is this prospective collapse of the building into continuous design ecology that engages the attention of Camila E. Sotomayor, in her *Landscapes of the Living Dead: Reanimating the Ruin Through Terrestrial Micro-Materials*. The design operator that Sotomayor employs acknowledges and mobilizes decay, as ‘both a creative agent and tracing medium’, celebrated in a documentary-historical excavation of the ‘ruin continuum’ and dramatized through acceleration into soft, perishable, ruin-positive materials.

Among the intricately interlinked and sequenced elements of Sotomayor’s project, it is the historical and reconstructive component that is the most perilous and treacherous, beset on all sides by false leads and lethal temptations. These range from the aesthetic trap of the ‘ruin fetish’ to the seductive ghosts and specters, haunting old photographs, that invite it back to the recollected dream world of anthropomorphic representation.

*As a result of historical conditioning, the ruin appears to us a romantic figure or nostalgic symbol representative of an era long gone. The painter, Joseph Gandy in 1830 depicted John Soane’s newly erected Bank of England as a sprawling cornucopia of crumbling arches and illustrious ruination meant to impress upon the viewer the magnificence of the new building in the present by demonstrating the building’s final condition, its projected end. Gandy speculates on the progressive decay of the Bank from its present to one possible future state. What occurs in our contemporary culture is the reversal of Gandy’s method, where the present is already in ruins and we project a romantic and nostalgic version of the past.*

To express the problem quasi-spinozistically, how is the *ruining ruin* to be rigorously differentiated from the *ruined ruin*, retrieving ruination as an inherent potential, rather than an evocative result? In other words, how does the ruin escape the structure of contemplation, nostalgia and melancholy, in order – or disorder – to release the sub-anthropomorphic impulse to creative deprogramming that infests it? This problem is shadowed by a dread specter that, whilst unnamed, still haunts Sotomayor’s investigation: *ruin value*.

In the earliest, ascendant years of the Third Reich, Albert Speer’s architectural vision of ‘ruin value’ attached itself instantly and enduringly to the Nazi id, due to its glorious morbidity. Everything new was to be constructed from a deep post-mortuary perspective, addressed to an audience in the distant future for whom the present architectural moment was ancient, scarcely remembered history. Monumental structures with exceptional ruin value would themselves provide the historical mnemonics for these unknown peoples, glutting their archaeologists upon awe-inspiring ruins, haunted by the ghosts of the dead Reich. According to the criterion of ruin value, the meaning of Nazi architecture would only be realized long after the utter eradication of its vital purpose, when not only the sociopolitical order, but even every lineage of continuous cultural transmission had been comprehensively

devastated and plunged into cultural discontinuities so profound that nothing beyond the nert and eroded masses of cyclopean edifices would survive them.

In this way, through sheer vastness, structural economy and material resilience, the Nazi visionaries anticipated a conservation of the architectural idea in a heroic-apocalyptic confrontation with time, building temples for the ghosts who would – millennia hence – inhabit their deserted remains. The social body lived for the skeletal relics it would bequeath to the far future, the species redeemed through the fossil, vital power through the mummified corpse. Framing this entire project was a tragic sense of cyclical and meandering time, conceived as an illimitable reservoir of exogeneous catastrophes, expressed through shattering discontinuity and the absolute eradication of organic connection. Separating the building from itself, and justifying it among the aeons, was the time rift between its present utility and final ruin value, jutting into the unnavigable gulfs of death.

The ironic failure of Nazi ruin value is demonstrated by the prominence of its conception or cultural transmission, against the scant physical remnants that were supposed to supplant it. Dreams of ruins have outlasted the ruins, because Nazi architecture was aborted by historical events, before arriving at the death it had sought for itself. Ruin value, like a time capsule, presupposes both hard durability and soft forgetting, but time need not oblige it in either.

Sotomayor's ruin continuum makes a different bet and takes the soft path. Rather than aligning with macrostructural persistence, purified through the obliteration of vital detail, it routes itself into the course of decay, systematically de-monumentalizing architecture to pursue volatile, mutable, molecular processes. Rot does not cleanse the architectural archetype, in Nazi-tragic style, by wiping away the distractions of organic complexity. Instead, architecture goes bad, or *becomes rotten*, by deliberately participating in the fate of the post-finalized structure and training itself away from the ideal of inert, enduring substance. Design learns to prolong itself into decay, guided into transformative experimentation.

As Sotomayor pursues the ruin continuum, from *Drawing with Decay*, through the Chthonic Fruit series and into *Re-Animator*, spectral seductions are dispelled by molecular experiments that awaken the 'living dead' as a viable architectural practice. Subtly, but inexorably, the Ballardian insight that 'cycles of growth and death are the same' is released from the contemplative ground of 'landscape' to become an engineering blueprint and then a prolonged design (of the Eniatype), reaching beyond the building, into its afterlife, with decay functionalized as 'an adaptable design component'.

The ruin continuum is not constrained by the template of projective planning, as 'a linear progression ... with a beginning and an end' stretching from 'the initial phase of construction' to the terminal point at which 'the building is abandoned'. However 'we, as observers, define the ruin [...] in actuality the building [and the ruin] continues to age and grows through its material decomposition'.

*The ruin continuum is reliant on the metabolic processes of transmogrification. The cyclic nature of the continuum is dependent upon the metabolic process of transmogrification. As the ruin continuum engages*

*with the chemical changes of matter, we no longer are passive observers of decay; rather, we become active participants at the cellular level.*

The ‘terminal’ structure that ‘the spectator perceives as abandoned and arrested is actually teeming with microscopic growths and new potential for design’. The architectural afterlife is still life, perhaps even an intensified liberated life, so that afterlife architecture is drawn into rigorous consideration of ‘the aesthetic, biological and architectural properties of decay materials’ and their ‘chemical transformations: aggregating, expanding, softening, blooming or liquefying’ as they are expressed through ‘erosion, rusting, vegetation, moisture, or animal activity at the cellular level ...’. Landscape is emulsified into an experimental architecture, spread through prolonged, microscopically animated, post-teleological designs.

*We are now experiencing the collapse of governing systems and the consequences of this breakdown in our space, our physical surroundings and in our every architecture. Taking a walk through present-day Athens is to encounter an abandoned building, store or city block every five minutes. Is Detroit, Motor City the poster urbanity for our future? If so, we must approach decay and ruin with both speculation and feasible science. It is no longer enough to merely conjecture about what science can do, or aestheticize nature to appear tangible for our own comprehension. Now is the time and space, to play with science and technology for not only visualizing a reanimation of the ruin but to make it a reality as well.*

Designing with decay subtracts the imperative of programmatic determinacy, in order to prolong the process of building beyond all structural finality. Nat Chard’s *Drawing Uncertainty* demonstrates a comparable – and even more explicit – swerve into counter-deterministic design.

Chard’s architectural approach is involutory, retracting the process of construction into an apparatus that is itself twisted back towards a reopened ‘design stage’. Rather than reaching forward into the afterlife of architectural structure, it turns back to destabilize ‘settled’ semiotic preliminaries. Within this schema, the process and product of building no longer confirms the completion of the plan, guiding a finite path towards architectural execution, but instead returns to dismantle the closure of design. The building – as notational scrambling apparatus – turns away from structural realization of a pre-determined idea and into the shape of a fantastic deprogramming machine.

For architectural drawings to serve as plans, they must reinforce a semiotic system oriented to strict determinism, programming a unique outcome, with maximum specificity. Only in this way is the fundamental relation between the idea and its realization sustainable. The prevalent notational culture facilitates the communication of settled (completed) ideas, allowing for the social segmentation of the architectural process, from plan, through construction, to product and use.

*In order that all the agencies that come in contact with architectural drawings understand them in the same way, architectural drawings have developed a sophisticated form of prescription so that the only possible interpretation is that intended by the architect.*

Unsettling such conventions amounts to a practice of retro-construction, beginning from the architectural afterlife or the previously parenthesized ‘use stage’. It first recognizes the design ecological reality of inhabitation, as a densely interconnected, innovative and thus intrinsically unpredictable pattern of occupation, radically incommensurate with any complete enumeration of anticipated functions. Pre-adaptation to eventual, indeterminate utility occurs in waves of time reversal, radiated back from an exploded finality. It deprogrammes the architectural process from end to origin, as backwash from an ultimate uncertainty.

Chard registers these waves of reversal in various ways. At their most lucid, they exhibit an art-historical regression, from the absolute perspective of 3D cinema and technical drawing, through modernistic disturbances of the picture plane and back towards an unfixed Renaissance, in which the problem of perspective realism remains unresolved. The principal nodes in this regression are moments of perverse or ludic spatial representation, in which perspective is left undefined, as an exogeneous, indeterministic factor: ‘includ[ing] anamorphic paintings, where our position in space changes the nature of the image, and seventeenth century peep shows where a combination of anamorphism and a folded picture plane provide a range of conditions depending on our vantage point’.

Whilst engaged in an articulate discussion of dimensionality, image projection, perspective and anamorphism, however, it is not argument or imagery that constitutes the main current of Chard’s destabilization of communicable spatial coherence – and thus deterministic structural planning. The primary carrier is an *apparatus*, or series of ‘drawing instruments’, incarnating retro-construction as a material and technical process. By ‘developing tools for [an] indeterminate practice’ the architectural endeavor attains spiral integrity, enveloping the entire circuit of notational and technical realization, but with a reversed time signature. Implementation flows back, from the far side of structural completion (inhabitation or utilization), through construction and into the earliest preliminaries of design. ‘When wondering how to make (and draw) an indeterminate architecture, one way to examine the possibilities that uncertain programs might provide is to look at research buildings that deal with unfamiliar programs’.

Beginning beyond the end, in the cryptic post-Space Race NASA complex at Cape Canaveral, feeds back from abandoned test launch sites to the tentative implementation of an ‘architectural automaton’ modeled on artificial birds. Chard’s technical involution, or cybernetic intensification of design, reconnects architectural purpose with its notational articulation, embodied in bird-like flights of paint. As it cycles back to the origin, the problem becomes conspicuously *cinematic*.

*When making the first tests there were two immediate observations. One was that the catapult could quickly be calibrated to achieve a higher degree of accuracy in its aim than had been anticipated and the other was that the flight of paint was so fast that when drawing with the instruments only the outcome was apparent – the event of the flight was lost. In their chronophotography Marey and Muybridge made divisions of time visible that were too fast to register in our normal perception. The temporal acuity registered*

*by the interval of their photographic registrations was enough to capture flying birds but not sufficient for flying paint.*

The wide-spectrum status of cinema, as a social, technological, and economic mega-apparatus, of sufficient scale to substantially define an historical epoch, and at the same time as a minutely detailed notational device, revolutionizing the anthropomorphic order of signs, facilitates a mapping over the entire architectural domain, from initial design to structural completion. Under conditions prevalent in early third millennium western societies, where collapsing commercial property markets intersect with an exploding potential for architectural virtualization, the cinematic seduction becomes increasingly irresistible – folding architecture into image-processing systems, either to confirm or to scramble it.

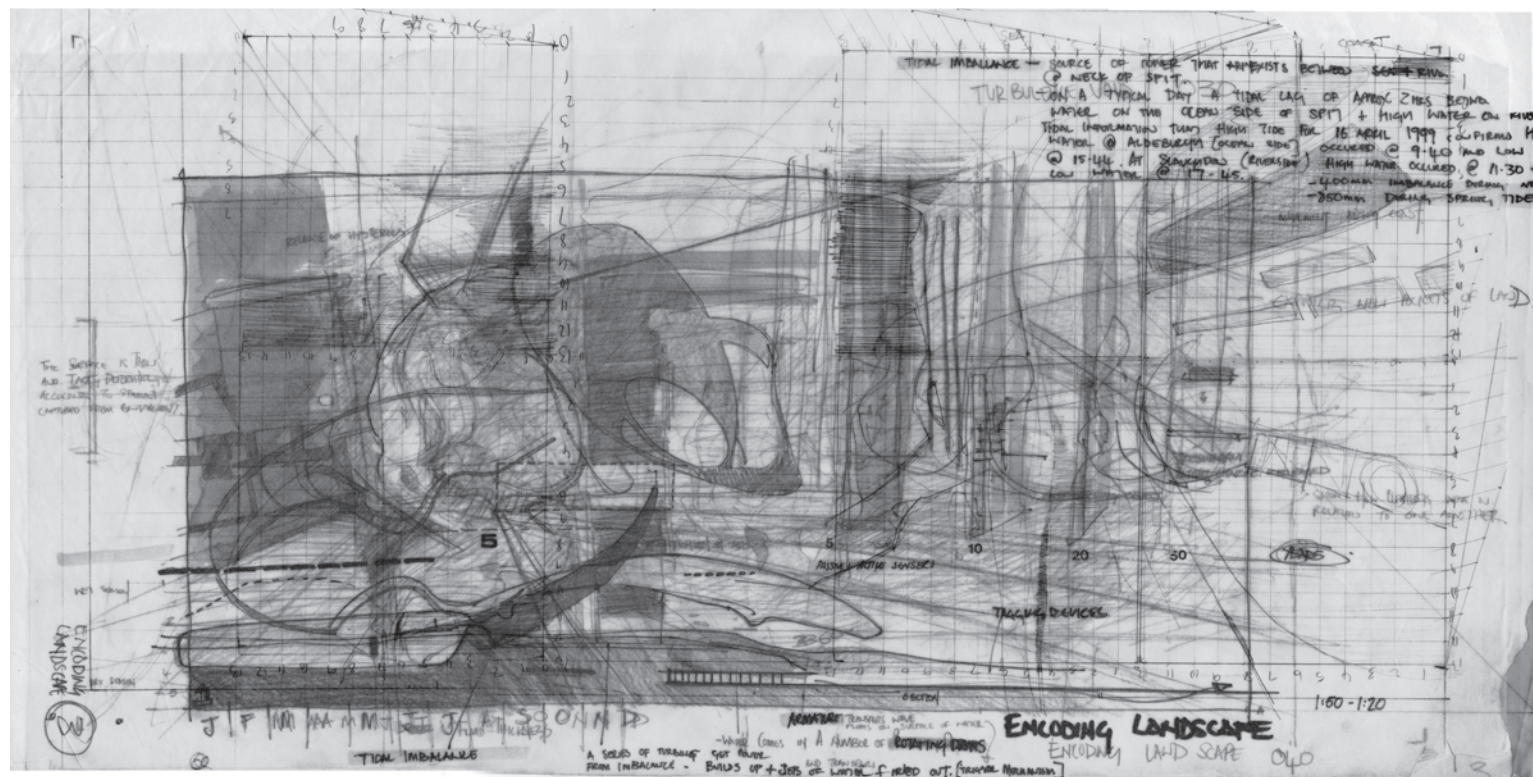
Simultaneously repelled by the bankruptcy of ‘the Real’ (occidental modernity), and lured into the realization of simulation, architecture finds itself cinematized, and fixed by twin (socio-technical) apocalyptic coordinates. It would not be here, on the screen, unless the movie had already started, and the theme – unmistakably – is the end of the world. Cyberspace does not open before the end times.

If design ecologies are disinclined to borrow settled images of interconnection, and begin, instead, to fabricate new ones, nature has to be reinvented. In *With the Raising of the Ground: Catastrophism, Geotrauma, and Cinema’s Ecological Niche*, Tim Matts and Aidan Tynan reassemble three recent works of apocalyptic film into a launch pad for Deleuzo-Barkerian explorations, on the way towards ‘a properly geophilosophical understanding of cinema that observes catastrophism as a genetic principle’.

There has been no shortage of ‘ecological thinking’ in relation to cinema, Matts and Tynan contend, but it has been dominated by ‘antiquated models of figure and ground’ and ‘pre-cinematic aesthetics of nature’, introducing catastrophe only as a limiting principle and conceiving man as ecologically adapted to a supportive environment. They argue, in contrast, ‘that cinema and ecology correspond not to a well-defined territory in a figure/ground relationship but to an ill-defined niche composed of elements in flight from what we might think of as natural determinations’. In the ‘entirely different conception of cinema and ecology’ that they propose ‘cinema refers to the production of an unconditioned perception and to a consequent liberation from the anthropocentrism and biocentrism of both naturalistic psychology and subjectivist phenomenology’. Cinema and ecology are not bound together by harmonic norms, but through a common, fundamental disruption – an ‘ungrounding’ that devastates all real possibility of organic perception or natural equilibrium. They track a comprehensive disaster that *has already happened*, so that the only ‘natural’ bond is shock.

*When Merleau-Ponty says that there is an excess of realism in cinema, or when Bergson says, on the contrary, that cinema misses the reality of movement, they are attesting, in different ways, to the same point: cinema grasps the emergence in perception of an unnaturalizable element within nature, of an unreality coextensive with reality, or of an ungrounding coextensive with the ground.*

It might seem that buildings and movies, despite numerous points of intersection, were unlikely to converge upon an integral problematic. Yet, in both cases, a dead future has been persistently



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misconceived and misplaced. Its recovery requires revision, as *afterlife*. Design ecologies register a signal from beyond the end, operationalizing it as a primordial – or non-anticipated – element. The consistency of Matts and Tynan with the Eniatype tendency is remarkable in this respect, and their theoretical lucidity is exceptional.

*While the post-apocalyptic is about a future in which the catastrophic event has come to pass, the pre-apocalyptic is more about a future anterior in which the event ‘will have’ occurred at a point that is never entirely present but which infuses the present retroactively with its effects. The present moment is attached to a future event but only by the form of a non-successional duration by which the present is an encrypted revelation of this future, a repetition always in advance of the repeated. If we can speak of a recapitulation of the past in the present, we must also speak of a repetition of the future through an invocation of the past.*

In the end, it inevitably returns to this. Welcome to the afterlife.

### *Contributor details*

Nick Land is the author of *The Thirst for Annihilation*; the collection of writings collected in the volume *Fanged Noumena* (Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011) and more recently the Urban Futures blog.

E-mail: ccru00@hotmail.com

Web: <http://www.thatsmags.com/shanghai/news-features/urban-future-blog>

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